

New Insights in Berlin

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As a young designer interested in theatre for young audiences you don't often get the chance to participate in many educational programmes so I was excited to be selected to take part in the Next Generation at Augenblickmal Ten in Berlin. Not only a chance for a new practitioner to see a variety of different productions, but also a challenge to my own preconceptions, views and ideas about theatre for young audiences. Meet new people, learn about theatre in Germany and return with a broader understanding about what I do and why I do it.

Even more so nowadays young people are getting a chance to grow up with theatre, challenging us as theatre makers to find new and exciting ways to connect with children and youth groups. I always believed the introduction of theatre in early stages assists children when growing up. People can draw on their experience in later life and career. Going on this trip showed me, however, that it doesn't stop there, I too can draw on my experiences, develop not only as a designer but as a person. Within the numerous shows I saw I was subjected to ideas that I felt worked on new levels, challenging how I've worked in the past. Methods and ideas I can draw upon in the future when producing my own work. There were also shows when I struggled to see what connection they would have with people let alone young audiences. Although experiencing such shows was still just as important as it allowed me to understand why certain things worked more than others.

My Own Adventure

The week threw up several challenges, one of which was of course the language barrier, making it hard to follow more complex storylines. I struggled with this at the beginning of the week - maybe because as an adult you are encouraged to grasp the plot. When working as a designer I would also be expected to understand as much as possible in order to visually realise it. As the week progressed, however, I found this a gift as it allowed me to see theatre through different eyes. ***The narrative became less important as I had the freedom to create my own adventure through what I experienced visually. Sometimes it felt like I was watching through a young child's eyes, experiencing it hands on.*** The visual aspect to each of the performances became even more relevant, not only to sustain interest but also create the environment within which the play was performed. Simple often works best as you avoid the picture, and therefore the context, becoming too confusing. It also seemed important for the performers to be clear about what message or ideas they were trying to convey, and how they chose to communicate it.

Over the week the performances that most struck me, for a variety of reasons were; *Rawums!* a play designed for two year olds, due to its simplicity but also

visually creative ways of engaging the children, both in an educational and entertaining sense. *Siebzehn (Seventeen)* was a prime example of how design plays a strong role in theatre for young audiences. Whether the story I was following was in fact the intended narrative became irrelevant as the visual side allowed me to understand the basic context that the actors were dealing with. Alongside the German programme of the festival we also had a taste of some visiting international companies. A company from Quebec produced a play called *Kiwi* which had some interesting ideas of how you can artistically mix media and performance.

Each performance I saw left me with something to learn from which made the whole trip both rewarding and challenging. An experience with fresh, new insights not just through the shows but through the views of others, people like me, who are creating the future theatre works for young people.

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